

Project Proposal

Proposal Title: Benmore Pastures Dixie Harrow Project

Proposal Number: 1361

DWR Region: Central Region

Lead Agency: USFS

County: Tooele

Project Manager: Karen Hartman

PM Phone: 8014915653

Regional Priority: Within Focus Area

Project Type: Terrestrial Habitat

Proposed Start Date: 10/1/2009

Project Location: Project is located 3 miles south of the town of Vernon in Tooele County.

Project Description: Dixie harrow and seed 1,000 acres of sagebrush habitat to improve brood rearing habitat for sage grouse

Description of Problem/Need: Sage-steppe and sage grouse habitat in the Vernon area is becoming increasingly mature. Naturally occurring vegetative mosaics within the landscape have diminished due to fire suppression. The majority of the proposed area is a continuous sagebrush population consisting of a single age class. The understory component (grasses and forbs) of the habitat consists of crested wheatgrass with few forbs to provide brood rearing habitat for sage

Sage grouse populations in the area have decreased from their historical numbers. Sage grouse have been petitioned to be listed as an endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list the species because of plans for habitat enhancement projects by working groups and government agencies. Members of the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Working Group feel this would be an excellent project to help sage grouse in this area. The proposed project lies within one of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) conservation focus areas. Sagebrush canopy cover is continuous with very few openings which could only be used by sage grouse for winter habitat. There is a need for more nesting and brood-rearing habitat. There is also a lack of forbs in the understory. Forbs are a major component of the sage grouse diet.

The Landscape Natural Fire Regime Group is III- infrequent, mixed & surface (less than 75% of the dominant overstory vegetation replaced). The Fire Regime Condition Class is 2- Moderate. Fire regimes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. Risk of losing key ecosystem components is moderate. Fire frequencies have departed from natural frequencies by one or more return intervals (either increased or decreased). This result in moderate changes to one or more of the following: fire size, intensity and severity, and landscape patterns. Vegetation and fuel attributes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. There is potential for Wildland Urban Interface fires as homes are located within one mile of the proposed project area. The fire hazard potential for the area is mostly high with small areas of moderate based on the BLM statewide fire hazard potential.

Objectives: Create openings in thick sagebrush cover. Establish a mix of native grasses and native and exotic forbs to provide food and attract insects for sage grouse broods. Improve sagebrush ageclass and vigor by thinning stands and removing decadent plants. Provide forage for livestock grazing.

Relevance to Strategic Plans: The project area occurs within the sagebrush steppe type which is one of the key habitats identified in the WAP. This area supports mule deer (Tier III) and Greater sage grouse (Tier II). Numerous other species of concern (Tier III) also inhabit the area including neotropical birds and raptors.

The proposed treatments lie within Central Region UPCD focus areas.

The proposed treatments will help address strategies outlined in the WDARM sage grouse conservation plan; Reduce the threat of conversion of sagebrush stands to invasive/noxious weed communities. Work with public and private partners to implement livestock management plans that address seasonal needs of sage-grouse and livestock operations. By 2016, increase brood-rearing habitat quality in the Resource Area.

The proposed projects will address some of the habitat management strategies outlined in the deer management plan for herd unit 19 (Vernon) including: continue to restore and improve sagebrush steppe habitats critical to deer according to DWR's Habitat Initiative; cooperate with federal land management agencies and private landowners in carrying out habitat improvements such as reseeds, controlled burns, water developments etc. on public and private lands; and maintain and/or enhance forage production through direct range improvements throughout the unit to achieve population management objectives.

The proposed projects will address the following goals and objectives of the Division of Wildlife Resources most recent strategic management plan:

Resource Goal: expand wildlife populations and conserve sensitive species by protecting and improving wildlife habitat.

Objective 1: protect existing wildlife habitat and improve 500,000 acres of critical habitats and watersheds throughout the state by 2010.

Objective 3: conserve sensitive species to prevent them from becoming listed as threatened or endangered.

Constituency Goal: Achieve broad-based support for Division programs and budgets by demonstrating the value of wildlife to all citizens of Utah.

Objective 2: improve communication with wildlife organizations, public officials, private landowners, and government agencies to obtain support for Division programs.

Uinta National Forest 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan

FW-Goal-1 □ Soil, air, and water resources provide for watershed health, public health and safety, long-term soil productivity, and

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ecosystem sustainability, and meet applicable laws and regulations.

FW-Goal-2 ☐ Biologically diverse, sustainable ecosystems maintain or enhance habitats for native flora and fauna, forest and rangeland health, watershed health, and water quality.

Sub-goal-2-1(G-2-1) ☐ The fuel management aspect of the fire management program is emphasized through application of hazard reduction activities.

Sub-goal-2-8(G-2-8) ☐ Ecosystem resilience is maintained by providing for a full range of seral stages and age classes (by cover type) that achieve a mosaic of habitat conditions and diversity to meet a variety of desired resource management objectives. Recruitment and sustainability of some early seral species and vegetation communities in the landscape are necessary to maintain ecosystem resilience to perturbations.

Sub-goal-2-10(G-2-10) ☐ Management actions maintain ecosystem health and encourage conditions that are within the historic range of variation. Management actions remain within the variability of size, intensity, and frequency of native disturbance regimes characteristic of the subject landscape and ecological processes.

Sub-goal-2-11(G-2-11) ☐ Key shrubs and/or trees are maintained to a level that allows adequate recruitment to maintain or recover the woody component. Specifically, the Forest is managed for more plants in the combined sprout and young categories than in the combined mature and dead categories.

Sub-goal-2-23(G-2-23) ☐ Areas identified as being of special concern for habitat such as big game winter range, big game natal areas, Canada lynx denning areas, and greater sage grouse breeding areas in the Vernon and Strawberry Reservoir Management Areas are maintained and, where potential exists, improved or expanded. Disturbances in these areas are limited during critical periods for wildlife.

Sub-goal-2-24(G-2-24) ☐ Adequate amounts and distribution of big game hiding and thermal cover are maintained. Adequate amounts of hiding cover for wildlife is retained around created openings and along roads where vegetative management activities are implemented.

Sub-goal-2-25(G-2-25) ☐ Maintain stable and upward conditions in big game winter range habitats and improve downward trend sites.

Objective-2-5(O-2-5) ☐ By 2013, accomplish at least 30,000 acres of vegetative treatments (combined total for all purposes).

Objective-2-17(O-2-17) ☐ By 2018, complete 1,000 acres of big game winter range habitat improvements to reach desired future conditions.

Sub-goal-8-4(G-8-4) ☐ Non-beneficial and/or unauthorized roads and trails are decommissioned, obliterated, or rehabilitated if they do not meet resource objectives or provide necessary access to facilities or inholdings.

Potential Risks: Release of rabbitbrush. Failure of seeded species to establish.

Proposed Methods: Dixie harrow approximately 1,000 acres in the 3,000 acre project area. Harrowed polygons will be small and irregular shaped to provide maximum edge effect. Polygons will be 2 way harrowed with seed applied prior to the second pass.

Shapefile Name: 1361_benmore_harrow_proposed_08042008

Seed Source: GBRC

UPCD Reg Team Coord Date: 1/13/2009

**Proposed
NEPA Action:**

**Proposed
Arch Action:**

☒ **Vegetation Monitoring** ☐ **Wildlife Monitoring**

Monitoring Information: One or two range trend studies will be established in the treatment areas which will monitor the vegetative response. Utilization data will be collected on shrubs and pellet group transects will monitor animal presence. The USFS also has 2 frequency study plots within the project area that will continue to be monitored.

Grazing Management: The project occurs within the Benmore allotment which is managed in a rest rotation system that has 12 pastures. The pastures that will be treated will be rested for at least 2 growing seasons. Reintroduction to grazing will occur when conditions warrant.

SPECIES BENEFITING

Greater Sage-grouse

Neotropical Birds

Burrowing Owl

Mule Deer

LAND OWNERSHIP

Owner	Acres
USFS	1000
Total	1000

Wednesday, March 11, 2009 12:27:17

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PROPOSED FUNDING

Source	Amount Requested	Date Approved	Amount Approved
Unfunded Balance	\$135,000.00		\$0.00
USFS	\$25,756.00		\$0.00
Volunteers	\$15,000.00		\$0.00
Totals	\$175,756.00		\$0.00

PROPOSED BUDGET

Item	Description	DWR Account	Partner Contrib.
Contractual Services	Dixie harrow 1,000 acres @ \$40/acre	\$40,000.00	\$0.00
Seed (GBRC)	seed for 1,000 acres @ \$80/acre	\$80,000.00	\$0.00
NEPA	NEPA preparation	\$0.00	\$25,756.00
Materials and Supplies	3 miles of fence material @ \$5,000/mile	\$15,000.00	\$0.00
Personal Services	3 miles of fence construction and rebuilding	\$0.00	\$15,000.00
	Totals	\$135,000.00	\$40,756.00

Project Map:

Benmore Pastures Habitat Improvement Project 08182008

